

EDUCATION

LOCAL COLLEGES IN THE NEWS

Education Equity Focus of Grant to HCC

HOLYOKE, MA - September 15, 2020 –When Holyoke Community College unveiled its four-year, Strategic Plan in 2018, one of its top priorities was increasing success rates of students of color. That aligned with goals established by the Massachusetts Dept. of Higher Education, which in the same year made equity the top policy and performance objective for the entire state public higher education system.

To support those ongoing efforts, the Lumina Foundation last week awarded the Mass. DHE grants worth \$1.2 million, with half the money earmarked for six state colleges and universities, including HCC.

HCC's \$100,000 award will be used to further the work of its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion task force and expand mentorship programs that focus on students of color.

"We have the distinct pleasure of residing in a diverse community where 50 percent of the residents are Latinx," President Christina Royal said during a Sept. 10 virtual panel discussion that coincided with the announcement of the Lumina grants. "At Holyoke Community College, our mission to educate, inspire and connect is grounded in the idea that we are of and exist for the communities we serve. Leveraging that cultural wealth is pivotal to moving the equity agenda forward."

Through its Talent, Innovation, Equity and Equity Institution grants, the Lumina Foundation seeks to dismantle systemic barriers to student success and degree attainment, particularly for Black and Latinx students. Massachusetts was only the fifth state to receive grants from the Lumina Foundation, an independent, private foundation based in Indi-



Students and staff gather for a weekly meeting of HCC's ALANA program in pre-COVID days. As part of a \$100,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation, HCC will be expanding mentorship programs like ALANA that focus on students of color.

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"Access to quality higher education can help set students up for a lifetime of success, but systemic inequities in our higher education system prevent far too many Black and brown students from achieving their full potential," said Mass. Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, who joined the Sept. 10 virtual gathering along with Sen. Elizabeth Warren. "It's critical that our campuses reflect the diversity of our communities and that our colleges and universities are equipped with the resources, data, and cultural competency to support students of every background."

During the panel discussion, Royal noted that Latinx students participating in HCC's ALANA Men in Motion program show a fall-to-fall retention rate of 75 percent, compared to 45 percent for Latinx students not participating in ALANA, an academic support, mentoring, and counseling program for African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American men.

"There's a great deal of research to show that mentorship has positive academic benefits for students of color," Royal said, "so we want to build on the successes of HCC programs like ALANA to provide students of color more vehicles to be connected with students, alumni and others like them."

HCC's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion group focuses on making sure students of color succeed at the same rate as their white peers, using benchmarks such as retention and college completion rates.

"Through the EDI group, we will be training a team of professionals on campus who know how to talk about equity, preach its importance and execute changes so that equity comes embedded in our culture, so it is what we live and breathe," Royal said.

In addition to the \$500,000 Talent, Innovation, Equity partnership grant awarded to the DHE, \$100,000 Equity Institution grants were awarded to HCC, Greenfield Com-

munity College, Bridgewater State University, Bunker Hill Community College, the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the Boston Foundation.

"We have been impressed and energized by the commitment to racial equity demonstrated at all levels of the Commonwealth," said Danette Howard, Lumina's senior vice president and chief strategy officer. "We believe the work ahead will catalyze structural improvements for equity within Massachusetts institutions and communities throughout the state."

"COVID-19 has exposed inequities across our state," said Carlos E. Santiago, Mass. Commissioner of Higher Education. "With Lumina's support, we will be able to accelerate our work to ensure that students of color from underserved communities feel welcome on campus and have the resources they need to complete their degrees and enter the workforce in a timely fashion." ■